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WILLIAM HAZLITT'S
ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGNERS

by

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Montana State University

1950

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to inquire how Hazlitt regarded foreign peoples. It has been said that he had a "Smollett-like repugnance for foreigners."¹ I have attempted to determine to what extent this feeling has been shown in his impressions which he contributed to The Morning Chronicle and which later he collected in a volume, Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy (1826).

Several of his other essays have been used as additional sources, since there was the possibility that his attitude toward foreign peoples might vary from time to time, depending on whether he met them in their own countries, read about them, or associated with them in England. He comments that he has changed his opinion of the French fifty times a day, because at every step, he wished to form a theory which at the next step would be contradicted. While individuals are strangers to foreign matters and customs, he thinks people cannot judge; that it would take almost a lifetime to understand reasons and differences.

Before embarking upon Hazlitt's detailed impressions of foreigners, it seems advisable to offer--in the next chapter--a sketch of his career and to explain--in a paragraph

¹ Albert C. Baugh, editor. A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, 1948), p. 1187.

here--his attitude on travel in general.

In his opening paragraph of Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy (1826)² Hazlitt states that the rule for traveling abroad is to take our common sense with us and leave our prejudices behind us. The object of traveling is to see and learn; but such is our impatience of ignorance, or the jealousy of our self-love, that we generally set up a certain preconception beforehand (in self-defense, or as a barrier against the lessons of experience,) and are surprised at or quarrel with all that does not conform to it. Let us think what we please of what we really find, but prejudge nothing. The intellectual, like the physical is best kept up by an exchange of commodities, instead of an ill-natured and idle search after grievances. The first thing an Englishman does on going to France is to find fault with what is French, because it is not English. If he is determined to confine all excellences to his own country, he had better remain at home. No individual, no nation is liked by another for the advantages it possesses over it in wit or wisdom, in happiness or virtue.³

² A. R. Weller and Arnold Glover. The Collected Works of William Hazlitt (London: John M. Dent and Company, 1903), IX, p. 89. Hereafter all references to Hazlitt's essays will be given as Works.

³ Ibid., p. 101.

In his essay "On Going a Journey" (1825) we read that there is undoubtedly a sensation in traveling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else, but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. The time spent there is both delightful and in a sense instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as our friends. Hazlitt remarks that he should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion, because he should want to hear at intervals the sound of his own language.⁴

⁴ Ibid., pp. 188-189, VI, "On Going a Journey."

WILLIAM HAZLITT

William Hazlitt, son of John Hazlitt, an Irish protestant, originally of Shrove Hill, Tipperary, was born at Maidstone, England, on April 10, 1778; his family moved to Bandon, County Cork, when he was eighteen months old. During their residence at Bandon, the father, a Unitarian minister, took the side of the Americans in their struggle against the motherland and interested himself in the welfare of some American prisoners at Kinsale. His letter to the War office resulted in an inquiry and several officers were reprimanded. Consequently life became unpleasant for Mr. Hazlitt and his family and he set out to find what peace he could for a man of his political and religious views in America.¹

For several years John Hazlitt had had a burning desire towards America and her liberty; and now that public sentiment had been aroused against him in Bandon, he and his family sailed for the new land in the spring of 1783. This was the beginning of moving from place to place to find himself a satisfactory parish. Even though his most earnest desire was to better establish the Unitarian faith in the new world, his heart might have failed him had he known of

¹ Catherine M. MacLean, Born Under Saturn (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944), p. 11.

the difficulties and enmity he was to meet, but since he did not know, he went on, determined and courageous.

For the Hazlitts, life in America was difficult at best; usually their houses were too small, too expensive, and too inadequate for comfortable living; food was costly and scarce; and the winters which were extremely cold and severe brought added hardships. An attack of the yellow fever left Mr. Hazlitt ill and unable to work for several months during which time he was under heavy expense. Two of his daughters died, and once when he was returning from a church in Maine he narrowly escaped drowning.

After moving about from one settlement to another, he finally met with acceptance at Carlisle near Philadelphia, where he might have had a permanent place with the possibility of becoming president of a college, which was being built, but the orthodox of the congregation made it a condition that he should subscribe to a confession of faith that they set before him. This he could not do, ... telling them to their faces that he would 'die in a ditch' rather than submit to any human authority in matters of faith.² He made several more attempts at finding a parish, but finally dissatisfied, disappointed, and discouraged he returned to England in October 1786. It is said that he founded the first Unitarian Church

² Ibid., p. 15.

in Boston, Massachusetts,³ but all that he had done to establish the Divine unity in the several colonies had been overlooked and unappreciated.⁴

For young William from his sixth to his ninth year the three years' sojourn in America seems to have been uneventful. He was a very precocious and energetic lad, who made many hard trips walking with his father to nearby settlements, where he listened with deep earnestness to his father's sermons. He had several playmates and friends with whom to enjoy his pastimes, but after his father's departure to England the son gave up all his enjoyments and almost killed himself in his study of Latin grammar.

On July 4, 1787, Mrs. Hazlitt with her children sailed from Boston to go first to London and later to Wem, where Mr. Hazlitt had secured for himself a church and where William was to spend some of the happiest times of his life. Early in his boyhood he learned to enjoy the pleasures of his days over and over again because he felt that experiences were not to be enjoyed only once but many times. His strong, keen memory in later years helped to brighten many of the darker hours which came into his life with happy recollections of beautiful sunny gardens, bright flowers, and colorful birds;

³ Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, editors, Dictionary of National Biography (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1908), IX, p. 317.

⁴ MacLean, Op. cit., pp. 20-21.

throughout his later years the boyhood days remained fresh, unchanged and secure in his thoughts.

About 1790 a decided change became noticeable in Hazlitt, who was then about twelve years old, and he lost much of the charm and happiness of his personality. He had been invited to visit at the home of Mrs. Tracy in Liverpool for several weeks and he had gone with anticipation of having an enjoyable time; instead it appears that he was not given the attention to which he had been accustomed at home. Once when this lady went visiting and left the boy alone he felt neglected and became sullen and morose. And this sullenness continued ever after, and formed the predominant feature of his character during the remainder of his schoolboy days.⁵ Also it was about this time that he began to show talent for satire, mimicry and caricature.⁶ His biographer states that at this time Hazlitt did not attend the family devotions or go to chapel. During the day he did not associate with his family and spent his nights roaming the hills. Howe quotes the elder Hazlitt as saying that the boy passed under a cloud which unfitted him for social intercourse.⁷

⁵ MacLean, op. cit., p. 45. "The Rev. Joseph Hunter of Bath, who became a friend of the Hazlitt family in later years, points to the year 1790 itself as the year in which the change became visible, and connects it with the Liverpool visit."

⁶ Percival P. Howe, Life of William Hazlitt (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), p. 13. Howe quotes the Rev. Joseph Hunter and his facts concerning Hazlitt's visit to Liverpool.

⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

Hazlitt's schooling had been at home under the supervision of his father, until he began his formal education at Hackney College in London in 1793; here he was to prepare himself for the ministry, but he found that his was not a temperament suited to the restrictions of clerical life; and he must have come to some understanding with his father, because he was allowed to withdraw during the summer of 1795. Since the "special grants" were to be used by the Divinity students only, it was impossible for him to use them in his study of literature; consequently his college career terminated at this time. He returned to his home at Wem, where his life was darkened by his father's disappointment and by his own uncertain future; "he felt he had something to say" and he hoped he might become a writer.⁸

It was in January, 1798, that Hazlitt rose one morning before daylight to walk ten miles in the mud to hear Coleridge preach in the Unitarian pulpit at Shrewsbury. After hearing Coleridge's inspiring sermon, Hazlitt felt that he could not have been happier had he heard the music of the spheres. The experience was beyond his hopes; he returned home well satisfied.⁹

⁸ MacLean, op. cit., p. 87.

⁹ Works, op. cit., XII, p. 260. "My First Acquaintance With the Poets."

On the following Tuesday Coleridge arrived at Wem to visit with Mr. Hazlitt, to whom a poet was a sort of non-descript, but they got on well and the day passed pleasantly. The next morning young Hazlitt walked six miles with Coleridge and upon parting from him was invited to visit Nether Stowey, Coleridge's home.

Late in May (1798) he arrived at Nether Stowey and was well received by Coleridge who immediately took him to see Wordsworth at All-Foxden but he had not returned from Bristol. After their simple meal, Dorothy Wordsworth permitted Coleridge to read some of her brother's poems. The next day Wordsworth arrived at Coleridge's cottage.

The three weeks at Nether Stowey were enjoyable to Hazlitt who was happy in rambling over hillsides or lying in the cool shade while Coleridge, Wordsworth or John Chester and he discussed poetry, poets, metaphysics and other subjects of common interest. He was deeply impressed with both Coleridge and Wordsworth and came home inspired to work on the uncompleted essay which he had begun at Hackney College. However the task caused him many tears and the paper was laid aside once more. If he could not write what he wanted to write, says Howe, he must be a painter. The time had arrived at which he must do something.¹⁰

¹⁰ Howe, op. cit., p. 49.

That autumn he was studying art in London. October 1802 found him in Paris at the Louvre filled with eager ambition to copy many of the famous pictures for collectors in England; several hours each day he spent in intense copying. At first he feared that the crowds would annoy him, but he quickly learned to become so engrossed in his work that he seldom knew that anyone was near.

He enjoyed Paris, although he thought it dirty and disagreeable except in the section of the Louvre which he considered more lovely than any part of London. After the Peace of Amiens it was difficult for the English to make friends and acquaintances in Paris, but Hazlitt formed a fine friendship with a young man named Edwards, who made it possible for Hazlitt to see more of the city than had he been left to himself. For him the Three Glories were the Louvre, the Gardens of the Tuilleries and the Theatre Francais.

Near the beginning of February 1803, he returned to England to become an itinerant portrait painter. It is said that he made a tour of some of the Midland counties and at Liverpool and Manchester he had luck in securing sitters. Often he was penniless and once he lived on coffee for two weeks. He painted portraits of Coleridge, of his son Hartley, and of Wordsworth, none of which received many favorable comments. His talent was mediocre and he himself realized that it was impossible for him to reach the heights of his

ambition. He liked good authors and good artists; he was interested only in the highest achievement. Great persons like Rubens, Rousseau, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Raphael, Burke and Shakespeare, who had succeeded, were his finest inspiration.¹¹ By 1805 he was home again at Wem; painting his father's portrait, studying colouring, and beginning to write essays which later were to bring him both praise and criticism.

On May 1, 1808 Hazlitt married Sarah Stoddart, a friend of Mary and Charles Lamb, and went to live in one of Sarah's cottages at Winterslow. He was happy here because he had a roof of his own over his head; he continued his painting; and he never tired of enjoying the beauty of trees, streams, and the "Air-wove" hills. Within walking distance were Salisbury, Fonthill Abbey, the Stonehenge, and Longford Castle in which were two fine Claudes, the "Morning" and "Evening", and a "Magdalen" by Guido.¹²

His marriage was a miserable failure because there was no love on either side and it had been said that Mrs. Hazlitt who was three years older than her husband, wanted to marry someone before it was too late.¹³ She was a woman

¹¹ Works, op. cit., I, p. xiv.

¹² MacLean, op. cit., p. 258.

¹³ Stanley J. Kunitz, editor. British Authors of the Nineteenth Century (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1936), p. 285.

of considerable reading and vigorous understanding. However she was an utterly incompetent housewife, despised ordinary proprieties, and had a love of incongruous finery. She had no sentiment, was slow to sympathize, and her estimate of Hazlitt's writing was considerably lower than his own.¹⁴ Hazlitt was no companion to her and was sometimes unfaithful.

By 1812 it was quite definitely seen that Hazlitt would never be a successful or prosperous painter and his alternative was literature, which was not then too highly paid. In January he began his lectures at Russell Institution in Brunswick Square; at first he was nervous and bashful, but before long he had fine delivery and was considered very capable.

After completing his lecture schedule, he turned to finishing the portrait of Thomas Robinson, which was long past due. His financial status at this time was somewhat desperate and he was often at his wit's end for his livelihood. Through the efforts and recommendations of Charles Lamb, he was hired as a reporter of the proceedings of Parliament for the Morning Chronicle.

Soon after his appointment to the newspaper, he brought his wife and child to London to live at No. 19, York Street, Westminster. Their small, awkward house had once been

¹⁴ Dictionary of National Biography, op. cit., IX, p. 320.

tenanted by Milton and to Hazlitt this was "classic ground;" however it never became a home because of Mrs. Hazlitt's inability to make it either comfortable or attractive. MacLean says, "All that we hear of 19 York Street leaves the impression that it was a place where a man and a woman lived together, but which neither the man or the woman had contrived to turn into a home."¹⁵

Early in 1814 he became dramatic critic for The Morning Chronicle and wrote excellent accounts of both actors and plays. Later he wrote political articles, but his Napoleonic sympathies caused a break in his friendship with Perry, the editor, and Hazlitt resigned his position.

Next he became essayist for The Examiner. Leigh Hunt, an essayist, realised that Hazlitt was a born essayist, whose work differed in scope and tone from his own. Before the end of the year, he suggested that they collaborate in a series of essays to be published in The Examiner under the title of The Round Table. MacLean states that there can be no doubt that this first year's work with Hunt tended to develop his (Hazlitt's) characteristic gift, to enable him to realise the possibilities of the essay as a commentary on human nature, and to help him to perfect it as a medium of expression.¹⁶

¹⁵ MacLean, op. cit., p. 296.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 313.

In the year 1815, he was almost overcome by the blow of Waterloo and was unfriendly to most of his fellowmen during the days of rejoicing. In February 1815 he published his first article in the Edinburgh and his work as dramatic critic and essayist for The Examiner kept him well occupied for the next two years. His essays, The Round Table, published in February, 1817, were severely criticized in the Quarterly Review. Some months later he published his essays on the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays and dedicated them to Charles Lamb, for whom he had deep affection and regard.

He began a course of lectures on English poetry on January 13, 1818, at Surrey Institution.¹⁷ During the summer of 1818 he returned to Winterslow to rest and to enjoy the quiet of the country. He began the work of composing a second course of lectures on the English Domestic Writers to be given early in November at the Surrey Institution.

In September, 1818, Blackwood's Magazine began an attack upon Hazlitt's character and morals; and, as Maclean records, it was to ruin Hazlitt's literary reputation and to cut him off from his chief means of livelihood.¹⁸ He answered the accusations by admitting that he sometimes had made mistakes but he had not been dishonest. Finally he was

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 371.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 388.

forced to take action against Blackwood, but later the action was withdrawn after the Publishers agreed to pay Hazlitt damages and all expenses.¹⁹

Hazlitt moved to the Southampton Buildings in London late in 1819. Here he became enamoured of Sarah Walker, the landlord's daughter. His passionate infatuation resulted in his asking his wife to give him his freedom. Since laws in England did not permit the granting of divorces it was necessary for them to go to Scotland and remain the required period of residence. He was forced to give several lectures at Glasgow to raise funds to pay his wife's expenses. On July 17, 1822, he was free to return to his beloved lady in London, but during his absence she had found a younger lover whom she married soon after. Slight though this incident may seem to be, it was for Hazlitt the major catastrophe of his life. It had done something to him which was worse than murder. In a sense he never got over the shock of it.²⁰ His grief and rage found vent in his book, Liber Amoris, which contained some very caustic remarks about Sarah Walker.

In spite of this, in 1824, he married a young widow named Isabella Bridgewater, who had an income of her own. They left immediately on a tour of France and Italy and

¹⁹ Howe, op. cit., p. 271.

²⁰ MacLean, op. cit., p. 434.

remained abroad for thirteen months. It may seem strange to some that he entered into a second marriage so soon after his passion for Sarah Walker, but to others who had watched the fluctuations of his mind and mood during this passion it was not so surprising.²¹ There is no doubt that he was aware of the need of forming a new relationship with someone and that his only chance of life and sanity was in some new human tie.

Isabella Hazlitt was a woman of gracious and winning personality and one who was very much interested in making her husband's friends welcome to their home. Consequently the friends had nothing but praise for the woman who had married him on account of his writings.²²

A second trip to Europe was made in 1826 when he was gathering materials for his Life of Napoleon. It was at the conclusion of this second tour (1827) that Mrs. Hazlitt went to her sister in Switzerland and when Hazlitt inquired when he should come for her, she replied, "Never." It is thought that the cause of the failure of his second marriage was in all probability Hazlitt's son who accompanied them. His admiration of his mother and his idea that she had been unjustly treated may have caused his stepmother to glance at future difficulties, and still another reason for the

²¹ MacLean, op. cit., pp. 502-503.

²² Ibid., p. 505.

separation may have been that she was frightened by the realization that their marriage had bigamous characteristics.²³

During his tour of France and Italy he wrote columns for The Morning Chronicle in which he tells what he saw and what his impressions were. Later these were published in 1826 in the volume, Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy. His extensive traveling, done in his early years, had made him exceedingly observant of his own countrymen, their habits and customs and also of peoples in other countries.

In addition to these facts of Hazlitt's life and career, it seems appropriate to give some of his personal characteristics to help the reader, who is not familiar with him, to more clearly understand his criticism and his praise of others.

William Hazlitt was intense and impassioned; and whatever he did--painting, loving, hating, praising--he did with "gusto." At times he was irritable, ill-tempered, yet he was a brilliant conversationalist, fond of games and well-skilled in them. He liked companionship in his happier moods but sooner or later he quarreled with all his friends. It seems fair enough to say of him that he did not realize how his aggressiveness affected others; he had no tact, and he said, "I think what I please, and say what I think," and yet

²³ Kunitz, op. cit., p. 286.

he wrote pathetically, "I want to know why everybody has such a dislike to me."²⁴ He liked to stroke people the wrong way and to do so gave him more pleasure than to praise them; it is said that hardly a day passed without bringing him some hate or pleasure, some pain or joy which made him withdraw to his inner self and thoughts. He had the courage to speak of another's faults, even though that other was a friend. He boasted that he had never changed an opinion since he was sixteen and had not read a book after he was thirty.²⁵

Howe quotes from The Atlas an article written on Hazlitt's death which reads in part: "All our contemporaries have mistaken, or otherwise failed to appreciate truly, the character of William Hazlitt. He was not the sort of man to whom justice could have been done effectually, for there was a waywardness in him that was sure to upset the cup before the wine was emptied. ... To those who knew him best he was a marvel. They saw what the world could not see, the strangest combinations and the most perplexing contradictions."²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Howe, op. cit., pp. 406-7. In the footnote Howe states that he thinks Cowden Clarke made the estimate of Hazlitt for The Atlas.

He had battled his way along during all his life, but when he died on September 18, 1830, his last words were "I have had a happy life."²⁷

²⁷ Ibid., p. 426.

THE ENGLISH

"Happy Country! Equally and stupidly satisfied with its vulgar vices and boasted virtues!"²⁸ Hazlitt says that he would not wish to lower anyone's idea of England, but rather to enlarge his notions of existence and enjoyment beyond it; then that person will not think the worse of his own country, because of thinking better of human nature. He remarks that "There's livers in England as well as out of it" and no matter how delightful or striking objects seem abroad they do not take the same hold of a person, nor can one identify himself with them as he can at home. Yet he says that it is well to see foreign countries to increase one's knowledge, and dispel prejudices, but our affections must remain at home.

Hazlitt writes that he is not very patriotic in his notions, nor prejudiced in favor of his own countrymen; and his reason is that he desires to have as good an opinion as he can of human nature in general.²⁹ If the English are the perfectionists that some people would make them out, he asks, What must the rest of the world be? He says that other nations should be entitled to a few advantages which the

²⁸ Works, IX, p. 287. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

²⁹ Any sense of Hazlitt's judgment on foreigners must depend on a knowledge of Hazlitt's judgment on his own people.

English do not have. He remarks that the French look across the channel and see nothing but mist and water and think that that is England; then the English who go abroad do not take away the prejudice against them by their looks, and they appear duller and sadder than they are.

If anyone supposes that the love of homeland in an Englishman suggests a friendly feeling or disposition to serve one of his countrymen, it is not true, says Hazlitt. It means only hatred to the French or the inhabitants of some other country. "Our love must begin with hate," he explains; it is well that the French are opposed to the English in almost every way, because the spirit of contradiction keeps them within bounds of decency and order. Also the interests of each country are better taken care of than if they were left to the mercy or opinion of the other side.

Lytton Strachey in his essay "Carlyle" tells the following anecdote:

"My grandfather, Edward Strachey, an Anglo-Indian of cultivation and intelligence, once accompanied Carlyle on an excursion to Paris in pre-railroad days. At their destination the postillion asked my grandfather for a tip; but the reply--it is Carlyle who tells the story--was a curt refusal, followed by the words--"Vous avez drive devilish slow."³⁰

"The reckless insularity, of this remark, continues

³⁰ Lytton Strachey, Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), p. 178.

Strachey, illustrates well enough the extraordinary change which had come over the English governing classes since the eighteenth century. Fifty years earlier a cultivated Englishman would have piqued himself upon answering the postillion in the idiom and the accent of Paris." And he explains, "But the Napoleonic wars, the industrial revolution, the romantic revival, the Victorian spirit, had brought about a relapse from the cosmopolitan suavity of eighteenth-century culture; the centrifugal forces, always latent in English life, had triumphed, and men's minds had shot off into the grooves of eccentricity and provincialism." He says further that "it is curious to notice the flux and reflux of these tendencies in the history of our literature: the divine amenity of Chaucer followed by no less divine idiosyncrasy of the Elizabethans; the exquisite vigour of the eighteenth century followed by the rampant vigour of the nineteenth; and today the return once more towards the Latin elements in our culture, the revulsion from the Germanic influences which obsessed our grandfathers, the preference for what is swift, what is well arranged and what is not too good."³¹

Hazlitt's essay "Character of John Bull" written in May, 1816, contains vivid descriptions of both the English and the French. At the beginning of the essay Hazlitt states that

³¹ Ibid.

he has listed characteristics of the French which were taken from Schlegel's "Lectures on Dramatic Literature" and which he says are "pretty near the truth."³² He says that he will endeavor to give a similar piece of justice to his own countrymen, who sometimes are likely to mistake the faults of others for so many virtues in themselves.³³

If the French are pleased with everything, remarks Hazlitt, John Bull is pleased with nothing. Ill-tempered, contrary, sulky, and thick-headed seem to be appropriate adjectives to describe the English character. John is fond of having his own way until you have let him have it, and he is so headstrong, that he thinks the spirit of contradiction is the same as love of independence. Hazlitt expresses the idea that the Englishman is put out when anyone agrees with him; that he is in the best humour when something gives him spleen; and that he is best satisfied when he is sulky. The Englishman flies into a rage when anyone finds fault with him; and if anyone praises him, he immediately imagines that that person is contriving against him. Hazlitt thinks that John Bull has always been surly, meddlesome and obstinate; and during recent years John's head has not been just right. A civil answer is

³² Works, I, p. 97. "Character of John Bull." A note on page 431, Vol. I... "The passage quoted is from a review by Hazlitt himself on Schlegel's "Lectures on Dramatic Literature," Vol. X, pp. 78-120.

³³ Ibid., I, p. 98.

too much to expect from John; words cost him more than blows; he doesn't speak because he has nothing to say; he appears stupid because he is, and he is a blockhead and a bully.

If living in a state of ill-humour all one's life is the perfection of human nature John Bull is nearly perfect, remarks Hazlitt. John "beats his wife, quarrels with his neighbors, damns his servants, and gets drunk to kill the time and keep up his spirits, and firmly believes himself the only unexceptionable, accomplished, moral and religious character in Christendom."³⁴

Hazlitt sees John Bull, the most uncomfortable of mortals, seeking his enjoyments, not in society, but at his own fireside where he may be as stupid, sullen, and ridiculous as he pleases but there will be no one to laugh at him.

In writing about the comforts of the English, Hazlitt explains in "Merry England" (1825) that the English people stand in need of every sort of accommodation because they are easily upset and annoyed if everything is not in its place and attractive. They are deeply offended by disagreeable tastes and odors, and consequently demand order and nicety. He says that they are sensitive to heat and cold, and unless everything is snug and warm, or cool and airy they are uneasy. Luxuries, no matter how simple, are needed to supply their physical wants and ward off pain; they receive satisfaction from order,

³⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

cleanliness, and plenty. Their liberty is the result of self-will; their religion, of the spleen; and their temper, of the climate.

Again referring to Hazlitt's essay "Character of John Bull," we see that John is conceited, narrow-minded and boastful both about himself and his country. Hazlitt credits John with having airs and wondering why the rest of the world doesn't see how amiable he is. John's intentions are good, but he has a rather peculiar way of showing his regard for the opinions and feelings of others; he has the habit of brusquely approaching another to present himself, but if this fails, he knocks the person down to show his sincerity.

He is "purse-proud" and is better pleased with himself if he has had a good dinner. Hazlitt thinks that John has peculiar ideas of beauty; for example, he admires most in a person's face the appearance of being well-fed on roast beef and plum pudding, and if he has a good round belly and a red face he thinks himself a great man.

John delights in a bugbear, which he must have regardless of consequences, and Hazlitt says that John is often led around by the nose and his pocket picked at the same time. Hazlitt's explanation for this practice appears to be his belief that the English as a nation are the "eager dupes of all sorts of quacks and imposters."³⁵ They are a dry,

³⁵ Works, XII, p. 297. "Queries and Answers."

plodding, matter-of-fact people who think all they hear or read must be true and are at the mercy of every rascal who will take the trouble to impose on them. He says they dislike anything that is fictitious and prefer to be amused by something solid and useful. Consequently they swallow pills, prophecies, and literary news, considering them all for gospel truth. They are given to judging at second hand, except of course in their hard, cold cash, and sometimes even in that. Lest they seem stupid, they try to be knowing, just as they become forward trying to be witty, and vulgar or common by attempting to be genteel.³⁶ This same John calls all other people rogues, but he wants to be known as honest; he thinks all other people fools, consequently he is wise; and he insists that he is a staunch patriot because he hates every other country.

Hazlitt reports that John is boastful of the excellent laws of his country and of the kindness shown to prisoners, yet there are more people hanged in England than in all of Europe besides. He brags of the modesty of his countrywomen and boasts of his great men, although he has no right to do it; he really doesn't care about them or know anything about them, but he will lord them over other nations. Because Shakespeare had been a deer-stealer in his youth, John likes

³⁶ Ibid.

him, but Newton's discoveries haven't taught him that the world is round. John likes to swear and consequently he has the nickname of "Monsieur God-damn-me." But with all his boasting and blustering, says Hazlitt, John is a dolt, whose jealousy of others makes him the dupe of quacks and imposters, and whose spite of one party makes him go all the lengths with another. His antipathies are imaginary and often unfair, and there is nothing so ignorant of its intentions as an English mob. "The English are more apt than any other nation to treat foreigners with contempt, because they seldom see anything but their own dress and manners."³⁷

Country people in England are somewhat unfriendly and skeptical of a stranger who comes to live among them; they form bad opinions of him and the more he tries to overcome the dislike, the more they are determined not to be convinced of his worth. If later, however, they should find him to be a quiet, inoffensive sort, they immediately dub him a fool. It might be said in passing that Hazlitt found the people of Winterslow extremely unfriendly at first, and some of the people could find no good in a person who made his living by painting and writing. The general run of country people are used to contempt and do not spare others of it. They even resent differences of clothing and appearance, as Charles

³⁷ Works, I, p. 74. "On Imitation".

Lamb learned to his sorrow when he had a tailor make him a pair of trousers when the Lamba visited the Hazlitts at Winterslow.

Hazlitt feels that it is strange that these rural people who know nothing, should hold such hatred for everything they do not understand. Because they have seldom heard anything outside their own village, everything unusual or new is to them odd and unaccountable. They have no knowledge of literature or painting; they think a poet is useless, but they like a painter a little. Hazlitt says the spinsters, the knitters, and the free maids may relieve a pedlar of his laces, love-knots or penny ballads but they care nothing for the lyrical ballads. One day a knowing fellow asked an artist who was busy sketching a yew tree whether he could tell how many feet of timber it contained. Some of the villagers would very gladly chase a painter from their town as they do a strange cur. They habitually pump up rumours at the town well and at the blacksmith shop they are forged for proofs, says Hazlitt, and "they lie like devils through thick and thin."³⁸ And all of this is done for want of better things to employ their time. However, they eagerly and readily believe all new or strange things and the greater the improbability the more greedily it is swallowed because it

³⁸ Works, XI, p. 312. "Character of the Country People."

increases the imagination.

He appears to think that John is an industrious individual with no taste for amusement, but rather with the desire to work six days of the week and to be idle for one. He makes awkward attempts at gaiety and is laughed at by other nations. John and his fellow countrymen are patient in doing what is repugnant and disagreeable; they confine themselves to the drudgery of mechanic arts and omit all thought of the Fine Arts, and Hazlitt states that the reason they "fail as a people in the Fine Arts is that the idea of the end absorbs that of the means."³⁹

It seems to Hazlitt that the English are the merriest people in the world, since they show their mirth only on high-days and holidays. He seems to explain that statement by this: "they have that sort of intermittent, fitful, irregular gaiety, which is neither worn out by habit, nor deadened by passion, but is sought with avidity as it takes the mind by surprise, is startled by a sense of oddity and incongruity, indulges its wayward humours or lively impulses with perfect freedom and lightness of heart..."⁴⁰ He thinks also that the English are like a boy loose from school or a dog freed of its collar, yet theirs is not the constant

³⁹ Works, XII, p. 194. "On Means and Ends."

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 16. "Merry England."

smiling, affected gaiety of the French, nor the voluptuous and indolent sort of the Italian. The English merriment fits the individual with a freshened mind so that he may return to serious business with greater cheerfulness and with something with which to while away the hours of thought or sadness. He cannot see how there can be high spirits without low ones, because everything has its cost according to circumstances.

The English have their own way of entertaining themselves, writes Hazlitt, and their mirth relaxes them and chases dull care away; even if sometimes it isn't too clear at first whether they are getting the spirit of the fun. No other people like field sports, Christmas festivals, or practical jokes better than they; no actor collects bigger crowds than "Punch" does with his blows, and scolding voice. The national games are practiced hard and are thoroughly understood; "the English like anything that raps their knuckles or makes their blood tingle; they do not dance or sing, but they make good cheer - 'eat, drink, and are merry'."⁴¹

The common people of England are like grown children, spoiled and sulky, but full of fun and merriment when some striking object suddenly attracts their attention. The crowds in the boxes or galleries of Drury-Lane or Covent-Garden are unsurpassed anywhere else in Europe for hilarious,

⁴¹ Ibid.

wholehearted laughter. Foreigners can hardly understand how the English can make so much of boxing, the hard blows given or received, or the perserverance of the fighters, and they think the English are barbarous and cruel because of their fondness and excitement for bull and badger fighting, cudgel playing, cock fighting and such diversions; they are unexcelled in hunting, fishing, and shooting with Robin Hood their "Patron saint of the sporting calendar." The scarlet coats of the hunting party, the confusion of the hounds, and the spirit of the horses are typical of the national character, as likewise is the angler "at one end of the rod with a worm at the other."

"The humour of English writing and description has often been wondered at; and it flows from the same source as the merry traits of their character."⁴² He suggests, too, that a certain amount of barbarity and rusticity are necessary qualities of humour; that without a hardness and repulsiveness of feeling the ludicrous will not exist. Clowns and country people are more amused, more disposed to laugh and make sport of the dress of strangers. He thinks that the French mind is not bothered or affected by absurdities and singularities which disappear in levity, and which in the Italian mind are lost in indolence or pleasure. But the ludicrous seizes hold

⁴² Ibid., p. 20.

of the English imagination and clings to it. Because the English resent any differences or peculiarities at first, but have no malice at heart, they are glad to turn everything into a jest; often they don't know what to make of some oddity and burst out laughing. Nevertheless, the English peculiarities or simplicity in turn supplies others material for this amusement.

It is possible that a greater refinement of manners may give birth to finer distinctions of satire and a nicer taste for the ridiculous, states Hazlitt, but the English character most likely will foster the greatest quantity of natural or striking humour in spite of its plodding tenaciousness and want of gaiety and quickness of perception. A company of raw recruits, awkward and unbending, are laughable, but they soon become trained in discipline and uniformity; so it is with nations which lose their grotesque qualities through education and intercourse. But there must be a mixture of manners to create some comic humour and there must be spectators "able to appreciate and embody its most remarkable features--wits as well as butts for ridicule."⁴³ Hazlitt cites Fielding and Hogarth, excellent examples of true English humour, but both grave men; and in France Moliere and Rabelais carry freedom of wit and humour to great heights. Hazlitt says he flatters

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

himself that the English are almost the only people left who understand and relish nonsense. They indulge their mirth to excess and folly and when they trifle, they do so in good earnest.

"Why are the English so fond of clubs, corporate bodies, joint stock companies, and large associations of all kinds?" asks Hazlitt in his essay "Queries and Answers" (1827). And his reply is "because they are the most unsociable set of people in the world: for being mostly at variance with each other, they are glad to get any one else to join and be on their side."⁴⁴ They join together to get rid of their sharp points and their sense of uncomfortable peculiarity; that is the reason then for their clubs, mobs, sects, parties, and spirit of co-operation. Hazlitt comments that an English mob is nothing more than a collection of violent and headstrong humours, which act doubly because of the force of each man's self-will and the sense of opposition to others. Hazlitt says that the same may be said of the nation at large.⁴⁵ Since the French do not gather into such strong and powerful masses and act with such a tenacious purpose, they unite and disperse more easily; it is the same with their ideas which join easily and as easily party company. "The French are full

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 296. "Queries and Answers: Or the Rule of Contrary."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

or wit and fancy, but without imagination and principle. The French are governed by fashion, the English by cabal."⁴⁶

Hazlitt states that the English people are a modest people except when they compare themselves with their neighbors, and that there is nothing which provokes their pride more than to find the neighbor more self-sufficient. Some things do not arouse their envy, but when Madame Pasta walks in upon the stage and looks like a young deer and then reveals the innermost feelings of the soul,⁴⁷ Hazlitt says the English wish she were theirs and they feel the tinge of self-sufficiency in their neighbor.

If there has been some difficulty and the English have brought a charge against some person, or the person has been called by a degrading name, they are so glad to enjoy grievances or are so incapable of having their imaginations raise themselves above such baseness, that if the accused person issued as an angel from the affair, the prejudice would still remain against him. Hazlitt says the "John Bull would as soon give up an estate as a bugbear."⁴⁸ The French gloss over a life of treachery with a brilliant epithet; with them

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Works, VII, p. 329. "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars."

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 331.

the last impression or the immediate one is the one that counts, but the English keep the first and it never wears out if it happens to be fairly strong and gloomy.

The English theatre audiences seem to Hazlitt to be boisterously rude, familiar, and supercilious; and the whole deportment is extremely bad and annoying sometimes. He says that one does not hear such jabbering at the Theatre Francais or the Italian Opera in Paris. In England the performing of operas is not for any real pleasures, but simply to run away from the pleasures of others; and the English become sulky and somewhat insensible when a drama or anything of like nature becomes a bit too common. "We import Opera-singers, dancers, kings! Liberal land! That knows its own deficiencies in what is refined and elevated. Happy, that it finds others so ready to oblige it. All that they get from us, is hard blows on hard cash: all that we get from them, is politeness and luxury."⁴⁹ Hazlitt says then that the question is--"Are the English essentially vulgar people or not?"⁵⁰ "If everything that they have of their own is vulgar and not worthy of the attention of the upper classes then the gentility are not fit to see anything better and are the most vulgar, formidable audience in Europe."⁵¹ Famous

⁴⁹ Works, XI, p. 371. "The Company at the Opera."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

actresses like Brocard and Madame Pasta are wasted on the higher society, so much so that their acting has declined, thinks Hazlitt; the crowd knows of the actresses' fame, but they do not pay much attention to the acting on the stage. The men of the audience are too much concerned about their own appearances and to whether or not the persons sitting beside them are good enough to talk to; the women in the boxes give the appearance of indifference to the play and seem to wish to display their clothes, their "paint" and their style --all of which makes up refinement in their eyes. Even the women in the lobbies are more refined than they are, says Hazlitt. The English have books which they send to Europe, but their fashionable people are the laughing stock of the world. Hazlitt delights to hear the Frenchwomen speak of the vulgar English women, just as the latter do about the rest of their countrywomen. Hazlitt says "English women, even of the highest rank, look like 'dowdies' in Paris, or exactly as country-women do in London.... A French millner or servant maid laughs (not without reason) at an English Duchess. The more our fair country women dress a la Francaise, the more unlucky they seem; and the more foreign graces they give themselves, the more awkward they grow."⁵² And young

⁵² Works, XII, pp. 225-226. "Aphorisms on Man," No. LIX.

Englishmen in Paris do not cut much figure in the company of Frenchmen of education and spirit. They fall from the first in manners, dress, and conversation. Not only have they to learn a language, but they must unlearn almost everything else. Words and actions are different in France and our young fellows very awkwardly and stubbornly free themselves of many of their prejudices. They find themselves clumsy both in wit and social contacts and consequently must endure French sneers, and every faux pas only adds to their discomfort and lack of confidence. And the French who try to lecture them on morals, manners and virtues, even presume to teach the English fellows the "true pronunciation and idiom of the English tongue."⁵³

"As we do not approve of everything foreign or French, we are more bound to acknowledge and do justice to what we like."⁵⁴ "And in judging nations, it will not do to deal in mere abstractions," continues Hazlitt. "In countries as well as individuals, there is a mixture of good and bad qualities; yet we may try to strike a general balance," explains Hazlitt, "and compare the rules with the exceptions."⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 226-227.

⁵⁴ Works, IX, p. 101. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

He writes that the English put the good, wholesome and respectable qualities into one heap and call it English, and the bad, unwholesome, and contemptible into another and call it French. But he seems to think that the danger of having an insolent local superiority over all the world may cause England to sink lower than other nations in everything, even in liberty.

THE FRENCH

A foreign tour ordinarily affords a traveler a vivid first-hand impression of the habits, the customs and the personalities of the inhabitants of the cities, the towns and the rural areas which he visits or travels through. Hazlitt had that opportunity in 1824 and 1825 when he toured France and Italy. Because he had a keen perception for details and saw the world through the eyes of an artist, his impressions of people, inns, food, amusements and scenery were recorded just as he saw them or as they affected his moods.

He learned to know the French as a nation who had no aversion to dirt; who were lively, good-natured, and agreeable in spite of their lack of cleanliness. When he visited France in 1802 and again in 1824; he found conditions similar; offensive smells from the narrow dirty streets both in Paris and in country towns went unnoticed; perfumes and pomades offset the odors; and the unpainted delapidated houses supplied the needs of the Frenchman whose thoughts were bent on the adornment of his own person. In Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy, (1826),⁵⁶ Hazlitt remarks that "if the French have lost their sense of smell, they should

⁵⁶ Works, IX, pp. 85-303.

reflect that others have not."⁵⁷

He thinks that the French are like children pleased with everything; in fact, he says that the English have a prejudice that the French are "pleased with a feather--tickled with a straw,"⁵⁸ and are not serious for very long. They seem to fail to attach any importance to anything, and as quickly as possible rid themselves of one sensation for another. Hazlitt thinks the Frenchman who is gross in his manners takes it for granted that he cannot annoy another with any of his actions; yet "he is sure to offend because he takes it for granted he must please."⁵⁹ He likes to shine, and how he can be indifferent to what others think of him is a surprise to Hazlitt.

The French of Paris are rude and careless in the streets; they run against travelers, who if they become angry, are saluted with bows from the French to show their politeness; and the coachmen who nearly drive over pedestrians keep the passengers in a constant panic of fear and alarm. The whole scene results in making the Parisians "whiffling, skittish, and snappish." If an Englishman ever turns in the street to complain of the rudeness, he is laughed at, says

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Hazlitt, and thought a blockhead.

Hazlitt thinks that some minds have greater facility for giving impressions than others have; and in this respect the French are a decided contrast to the English. A Frenchman usually greets another with lively indifference; an Englishman feels his way with a newcomer and either reserves his attention or gives the other his entire confidence. A Frenchman, says Hazlitt, is just naturally friendly but an Englishman is so from pure habit. He pays more for his virtues and vices than a Frenchman does; he speaks his mind more plainly also. The French are accused of making more promises than they fulfill; however that may be, he suggests that the English may be too opposed to performing what they promise and consequently they are even on that score.

It would seem that Hazlitt does not appreciate the animation and gesticulation of the French, because these make them a theatrical people, and if they are polite he says that they are like monkeys. He thinks the French are extremely changeable; their sentiments, so far as he can see, are easily put on and off like the costumes of an actor. They appear to be a people callous and insensible to anything like common decency.⁶⁰

In contrast to the lively, happy nature of the French

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

is their gravity and seriousness. Hazlitt has called them both "the gayest of the gay, and gravest of the grave."⁶¹ This quality of seriousness may often be overlooked by other nations, especially the English, because of the national antipathy toward each other. Hazlitt says that this contradiction of the French character which has gone unnoticed has not had its due credit and yet it has stared people in the face everywhere. He seems to think that the mistake of believing the French frivolous and thoughtless is one which the English would do well to correct by having further and closer acquaintance with their French neighbor.

It is remarkable to Hazlitt that the animated expressions of the French often change to a melancholy blank; their actions are light and volatile; yet they are the most plodding people of all Europe and the most mechanical; at times nothing seems to shock them, while at others mere trifles offend them. He thinks that the smallest things make the most impression on them and that they believe in being that which gives them the least pain or causes them the least trouble.

A certain lightness and peevishness in the French is misjudged by the English to be inconsistent with thought and steady application; and the English, writes Hazlitt, flatter themselves that not to be merry is to be wise. He thinks the

⁶¹ Ibid., I, p. 97. "On the Character of John Bull."

English are slower than the French, but if they once take up a grievance or some sore subject they do not give up so soon as the French who do not enjoy grievances or sore subjects. However, he says the English enjoy being disagreeably repulsive and delight in fighting through grievances.⁶²

In Paris the tone of society is very far from "John Bullish," writes Hazlitt. "They do not ask about a man's parentage, his wealth or that of his family, his bank account, or his means of traveling about. An English soldier of fortune, or a great traveler is listened to with some attention as a marked character, while a booby lord is no more regarded than his own footman in livery. The blank after a man's name is expected to be filled up with talents and adventures, or he passes for what he is, a cipher."⁶³

True admiration of another becomes almost a passion, he says, and people in general take enjoyment in enhancing the excellences of others as if they were their own; also that "our admiration of others is stronger than our vanity."⁶⁴ It is, he continues, a poor mind which has no idol but itself. It is the lack of imagination and enthusiasm or the personal conceit of every Frenchman, which does not let him see or

⁶² Ibid., IX, p. 121.

⁶³ Ibid., XII, p. 226. "Aphorisms on Man," No. LXI.

⁶⁴ Ibid., XI, p. 258. "On Rochefoucault's Maxims."

feel anything, beyond them "that makes the French perhaps the most contemptible people in the world."⁶⁵

French individuals are more studious than English. For example Hazlitt has respect and praise for a Frenchman who lives across the street at another hotel. This man spends his time in reading something worthwhile during the morning hours; he plays with his children after luncheon, and he has a game of cards and pleasant conversation in the evening. Not so the Englishman, says Hazlitt, who spends his time in the street with horses and a servant, trying to appear to others as a talented equestrian; while his wife in the evenings wants to be running out to something new and frivolous.

It is generally agreed that peculiarities and customs are common to every nation. Hazlitt shows that France, like England, is no exception to the rule. He seems to dislike the habit of the French of talking to animals of all descriptions, parrots, dogs, and monkeys; and he thinks they do this to keep the talk all to themselves, to make propositions, and to fancy the answers. Another custom which he dislikes is having dogs in stagecoaches, and he doesn't appreciate seeing little lap-dogs with red eyes being washed and combed. He is surprised and pleased at having a man and a woman sing "God Save the King" under his hotel window and adds that such

⁶⁵ Ibid.

a courtesy to a visiting Frenchman would be unheard of in England.

The daily practice of decorating graves and tombs with out flowers doesn't appeal to him. It suggest to him the idea that "the rich and the poor, the mean and the mighty, all putting on a fair outside as in their lifetime."⁶⁶ He thinks that the English may be a bit too solemn with their black yew-trees to darken the scene in the cemetery, but yet he says that the perennial plants, the shrubs, and the cold marble cherish and soften regret. True sorrow, he believes, is manly and decent, not effeminate or theatrical.

With due civility the French treat English travelers and pay particular attention to those who speak French well or with tolerable correctness; such thoughtfulness in another's learning their language has the result of flattering the French individual as well as France, and they are better pleased with their conversations.

Hazlitt explains that French cooking includes English dishes and consequently an Englishman is better off in France than a Frenchman is in England where no such courtesy is shown him.

Also the familiarity of common servants in France, he knows, surprises the English at first, but, he says, it really

⁶⁶ Works, IX, p. 145." "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

has nothing offensive in it, "any more than the good-natured gambols and freedom of a Newfoundland dog."⁶⁷

Generally speaking Hazlitt finds the French innkeepers, coachmen, servants, and country people easy-tempered, with a smile and civil answer for the stranger. They are polite and obliging, but they consider they have a right to cheat the traveler if they can. And then if he complains, it is he who makes the breach of good manners and a disturbance of the social contact. Hazlitt also says that travelers are more easily and quickly irritated at frequent impositions because of their ignorance of the ways of the world and because of the novelty of the scene. Then he states that "the petty tricks and shuffling behavior we meet with on the road are a greater baulk to our warm, sanguine, buoyant, traveling impulse."⁶⁸

Hazlitt's first night at the French theatre seems to have convinced him of the seriousness and decorum of a French audience. The minute the play begins the people become quiet and attentive because the least bit of noise is very much disapproved. Their attention gives the whole scene the atmosphere and air of a professional lecture. He explains that an English audience would be put to shame by such

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 182.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 184.

attention, interest, and sympathy as the French give their actors; and a French crowd know their plays better than the English know Shakespeare; the vivacious French respond more quickly than the slower English whose enthusiasm must be aroused by the power of imagination. ...It is to them a superfluity--a thankless toil.⁶⁹ He criticizes his own countrymen who do not pay the same attention to a play of Shakespeare's or to anything else, but a cock fight or a sparring match. He thinks it is no credit to them, but a fine compliment to the gravity of the French who sit quietly through a play which the English would hoot from the stage. It seems impossible that the French can relax in complete composure and quiet; and it surprises Hazlitt so much, that their stillness is ridiculous and he compares them to "flies caught in treacle."⁷⁰

He dislikes however the lack of play bills at the French theatres and finds it an inconvenience not to have some form of printed information about the story of the play and the cast of actors. He realizes the uselessness of the programs for French audiences who are constant visitors and are somewhat a part of the cast behind scenes. He also thinks it a bad practice to have too many new plays because

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

the English people in the audiences don't know French well enough, usually, to be able to keep abreast the change of program.

In his essay "Thoughts on Taste," (1818), Hazlitt remarks that there is a greater number of habitual readers and playgoers in France, who are ardent admirers of Racine and Moliere than there are in England of Shakespeare. He wonders whether Shakespeare's fame rests on a less broad and solid foundation than either of the two just named. Since no Frenchman could write Shakespeare's plays, it is quite possible that they can understand him. Still he thinks it unfair to take this inability of the French as any mark of superiority on the part of the English, for there are many people in England in the same predicament.

He makes it clear that the love of Racine gives them a greater enjoyment in his plays, lines of which they quote by heart, and this love is always with them and not left behind in the theatre when the play has ended. To Hazlitt the theatre is the "Throne of French character, where it is mounted on its pedestal of pride and seen to advantage."⁷¹ He thinks it a good place for him and the French to meet because it reconciles him to them and to himself. He writes in his "Old English Writers and Speakers," "Nations (parti-

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 118.

cularly rival Nations) are bad judges of another's literature or physiognomy. The French certainly do not understand us; it is more probable we do not understand them."⁷²

Since the French do not like or understand Shakespeare, it is not to be supposed that they should like or understand anyone who goes near to represent him, Hazlitt states. Consequently it is not surprising to him that the French find fault with Mr. Kean, whom he admires and who is the only actor of much genius that the English possess. The French do not appreciate an actor's giving an interpretation or inflection of feeling for which the entire audience is not prepared; it is a rule in France, Hazlitt states, that no person is wiser than another. Also he thinks that for others to despise what we admire, is always to assume an attitude of seeming superiority over us: to admire what we do not think much of, is to give us our revenge again. In his essay, "Mr. Kean," (1828), he tells of several actors and an actress all of whom meet with praise and approbation from the French critics except Mr. Kean. The others are accepted as a class, he writes, but "Mr. Kean, on the other hand, stands alone,-- is merely an original; and the French hate originality; it seems to imply that there is some possible excellence or

⁷² Works, VII, p. 323. "Old English Writers and Speakers."

talent that they are without!"⁷³

According to Hazlitt's opinion the opera of Paris is inferior to that of London. He attends the Royal Academy of Music and is surprised to find that it is only partly filled with drably dressed men and women. It lacks the blaze of beauty and sparkle of fashion; the ladies in the boxes are not so beautiful as those of London, and he wonders where the beauties of Paris hide themselves. During the performance he is amused by the prompter who is never quiet for a minute, but tosses his hands, snaps his fingers, nods his head, and beats time with his feet, all of which he seems to enjoy most heartily. Not far from the prompter sits an old gentleman whom Hazlitt describes with powdered head and a coat of finest black. Not once did the gentleman turn his head or shift his position and not once did Hazlitt see an expression of pleasure or pain. Ordinarily a Frenchman has no object in life but to talk and move with eclat, Hazlitt says, and when he ceases to do either he has no heart to do anything else, he becomes merely a costume and a powdered wig. A Frenchman is nothing without powder and an Englishman is nothing with it. The character of the one is artificial, that of the other natural.⁷⁴

⁷³ Works., XI, p. 391. "Mr. Kean."

⁷⁴ Ibid., IX, p. 172. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

The one thing at the French opera which surprises Hazlitt most is that the French should fancy they can dance.⁷⁵ He says their opera-dancers think it graceful to stand on one leg or on the points of their toes, with one leg stretched out behind them as if they were to be shod. He compares them to flat-footed spiders running across a web and to peacocks strutting about with infirm steps. There is neither voluptuousness nor grace in a single movement, but merely an attempt to show the number of difficult positions the human body can be put into and kept in great rapidity of evolution. The Parisian "trip" is not graceful, but more like the motion of a puppet, and it may be mimicked whereas grace cannot.

The French think less about their music than any other of their talents. Hazlitt also notices the absence of street musicians and strolling groups of singing people like those he sees at home. In fact the French care little for music except for the accompaniment of a step dance, because it interrupts their conversation. They have no national music, continues Hazlitt, except for some chansons, and their excellent music is that of great rapidity or intense loudness.

After seeing the French in their theatres Hazlitt states that they are no longer a distinct race or caste, but instead human beings like the English, and that feeling

⁷⁵ Ibid.

towards others as though they are of a different species is not the way for the English to increase respect for themselves or for human nature generally.

The French are avid readers, even though they laugh more and talk more than the English, and Hazlitt suspects that they even think more. He writes that the French, men and women alike, wherever they are at work, in their homes, or at leisure in the fresh air, snatch every opportunity they can to read.

He seems to have had an agreeable opinion of the ability of French women to participate aptly in the interchange of ideas with men. In the essay, "On the Conversations of Authors," (1822), Hazlitt discusses the difficulty of carrying on conversations when women are present, because they think only of themselves and expect the men to think only of them also. He says that in France this is not the case; women there talk of things in general and reason better than the men. They are the mistresses of the intellectual foils and are adept in all topics. They are aware what is to be said for and against certain topics, and they are full of mischief too at times; they are subtle and it is a rule/^{not} to ask them the reasons for their opinions, as well as unfair to disagree with them. From the outset a man finds that he must argue as well as bow himself into the good graces of modern Amazons. And Hazlitt

exclaims, "What a situation for an Englishman to be placed in!"⁷⁶ In a footnote about the same subject Hazlitt seems to admit the ability of the French and he speaks as follows:

"The topic of metaphysics having got into female society in France is proof how much they must have been discussed there generally, and how unfounded the charge is which we bring against them of excessive thoughtlessness and frivolity. The French (taken all together) are a more sensible, reflecting, and better informed people than the English."⁷⁷

The French are a people who practice the arts and sciences naturally. Hazlitt asks the question, "What are their chemists, their astronomers, their naturalists, their painters, their sculptors? If not the greatest and most inventive geniuses, the most accurate compilers, and the most severe students in their several departments."⁷⁸ In science, if we have discovered the principles, they have gone into details, remarks Hazlitt; their refinements in art consist chiefly in an attention to rules and details, but then it does imply an attention to these, which is contrary to our idea of the flighty French character.⁷⁹ It may be gathered from his discussion that the French are fairly deliberate and determined

⁷⁶ Ibid., VII, p. 31. "On the Conversation of Authors."

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., IX, p. 120. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

⁷⁹ Ibid.

in art work; that they are not so eager to reach perfection in a single stride and that there is a want of taste and genius in their productions.

He points out that the French and English schools of art differ; and the two nations disapprove of each other's style; he thinks that they will probably keep on being satisfied with the defects of the other and that will give them both good consolation. He says among other things that the English see "general masses and strong effects; the French only lines and precise differences. The one dry, hard, and minute; the other as gross, gothic, and unfinished,"⁸⁰ yet both expect to arrive eventually at complete results.

Hazlitt makes the statement that "the French hate Shakespeare and Rubens for no other reason than there is nothing in their minds which really enables them to understand or relish either."⁸¹ He says that the admiration which they bear expressed for either of these two great men appears to them to be false opinion and taste, and a "bigoted preference of that which is full of faults to that--which is without beauties."⁸² He continues that the disputes and jealousies of the nations about their productions come chiefly from such ideas as the one just quoted. In addition he says we despise

⁸⁰ Ibid., XX, p. 220. "On the Imitation of Nature."

⁸¹ Ibid., XI, p. 256. "On Roohefaucault's Maxims."

⁸² Ibid.

French painting, French poetry and French philosophy, not because they are French, but because they appear to us to want the essential requisites of genius, feeling, and common sense. Because Titian, Rembrandt, Phidias, Homer, Boccace, and Cervantes speak the universal language of truth and nature. Hazlitt ~~says~~, we feel no reluctance to admire them, merely because they are not English. He thinks that national and local prejudices for the greater part act as the barrier against national and local absurdities everywhere.

THE ITALIANS

In July 1825 Hazlitt had his first impression of the Italians at the inn where he ate his breakfast, when he began his tour of Italy after his visit in France. From the very first, he is struck with the air of indifference, insolence and hollow swaggering about the inn. The people seem to say, "What do you think of us Italians? Whatever you think, we care very little about the matter."⁸³ Hazlitt writes that "the French are a politer people than the Italians, and the English are honestest."⁸⁴

He finds the inns throughout Italy very much the same, with the waiters receiving guests with a mixture of familiarity and fierceness. They show either a fawning sleekness or an insolence which makes a traveler feel as if they had him in their power. All the waiters in Italy are men, and Hazlitt seems rather displeased with this practice. Among the servant groups he finds the custom of cheating travelers, especially if there seems to be good understanding and courtesy from the latter; however, the servant knows he is being checked on his honesty and on the kind and amount of his service when the traveler shows signs of indignity and concern.

⁸³ Works, IX, p. 198. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

⁸⁴ Ibid.

At some of the inns the carpet is stuck to the floor with age and filth. One of the sleeping accommodations is nothing more than a sitting room with three beds without curtains, and with coverlets like horse-cloths stuffed with leaves of corn; the whole apartment makes one think of a stable. Sometimes he finds better accommodations than he expects, but everywhere milk is to be had only in the morning. However, he remedies that difficulty by taking a bottle of it with him from inn to inn; and because the weather is fairly cold the milk freezes and stays sweet. In some parts of Italy a traveler is a curiosity and consequently people are not prepared to serve meals or give lodging; and to a person from England where the roads are thoroughfares frequented daily by travelers, it is a bit disconcerting to find poor hostelries.

Hazlitt learns to his sorrow that when one travels by vetturas, the innkeepers and the drivers have a scheme by which a traveler pays in a lump sum his coach fare and his board, but he is to be fed the cheapest fare possible. Consequently Hazlitt finds badly prepared food in scanty rations, unsatisfactory sleeping quarters, uncivil innkeepers, and skeptical, unobliging waiters at each of the vetturas inns. He finds out, too, that it is of little use to complain because each of the conspiracy says he is not to blame and he must complain to someone else. Hazlitt decides that the best method is for him to pay his coach fare and then pay for his

meals after he has eaten. Some of the inns are mere hovels, but he says that he was more often given a kind reception there than at the better inns. He remarks that the courtesy in cities or palaces usually means little, but that which comes from cottages and mountain side issues from the heart and is more gladly received.

During Hazlitt's first evening walk at Turin he sees several young Italian women in English dresses walking on the terrace, with gentle grace and decorum so different from the gay French ladies or the serious English. But that is the last he sees of Italian beauty and he wonders why it is so. From then on the only Italian women Hazlitt sees are detestably ugly, with reddish brown skins often marked by small pox and with pug features. They are fierce looking women, dirty and lazy, with seemingly no desire to present a pleasing appearance. He says that it is asserted that Italian women are more gross than others and he says he can believe it, yet at the same time he thinks they may be more refined than others. But he gives no reason for his opinion. He says also that he has heard Italian women say things that others would not, but that does not mean that they do them. He seems to say very little about the men except that they are very much like the English except they have a greater degree of fire and spirit.

Hazlitt visits the Opera in Turin. It is too crowded,

and too dark except for the dim light on the stage. It is hot, gloomy, yet gorgeous. The usher is kept busy telling the fashionable ladies who speak too loudly to be quiet. No attention is given to the acting or singing unless something unusual attracts the attention of the audience, and then they laugh heartily and seem enthusiastic. The piece that is being played is grotesque and fantastic, so all in all Hazlitt's visit is not too enjoyable.

As Hazlitt travels toward Rome, it is Carnival time and he is attracted by the "variety of rich dresses red, green, and yellow, the high-plaited headdresses of the women, some in the shape of helmets with pins stuck in them like skewers." Some wear gold crosses on their bosoms and others carry large muffs. The countryside is cornfields, orchards, vineyards, villages, and hamlets with workers busy in the fields while crowds of peasants, robust and cheerful, are flocking in villages or are walking to or from the market towns.

The groups of people lounging in the streets of Parma talk and laugh, and the general character of the populace seems to be natural and unaffected. Hazlitt says that he sees none of the affectation and smirking graces of the French which make them have so many enemies. And he says that if an individual shows a delight in himself it is so with nations.

In Florence he sees the carriages, numerous and splendid, driving through the parks and rivaling those of London.

The people who ride in them are no different from Londoners except that they are darker and more serious. It is Carnival time in Florence, too, and the streets are crowded with masked people, the uniformity of which soon becomes monotonous.

Hazlitt is disappointed in Rome, it seems, with its narrow, dirty streets, with the smell of garlic and with the melancholy dingy houses, and he thinks "Rome is great only in ruins." However, he is surprised and satisfied, it appears, with the well-dressed country people, and the good behavior of the crowd that gathers to see the Pope give his benediction. Great throngs of people flock to Rome during Lent and Easter and Hazlitt remarks about the variety of costumes, the handsome features, and the good-humoured faces. He speaks his dislike of the pilgrims with greasy cloaks and disgusting hypocrisy.

While Hazlitt travels from Bologna to Verona, he passes through rich, fairly prosperous territory and he says that the idea which the English have that there is no industry or agriculture outside of England certainly does not apply there. If poverty is to be found in Italy, it is not in the Northern district, states Hazlitt, where the farmers and peasants seem well off and industrious. He says also that the Northern Italians are as fine people as any on earth and all that they want is to be left alone.

An Italian or a Frenchman laughs heartily if he finds

a worm in his vegetables or salad and considers it a "superfluous delicacy" and his food enriched by it. He says, too, that the Italians, Spaniards, and people of the South swarm alive without being sick or sorry at the circumstances. No matter where they are on highways or street they hunt each other's heads for prey and are not shamed or irked in doing so. Combs are the invention of our Northern climes, writes Hazlitt. He seems to understand that the Italian has such vermin because he is dirty, dingy, and greasy with a tingling oily sensation all over his body and the presence of vermin goes unnoticed. He thinks he can forgive dirt in a beggar or gypsy because of the kind of life he lives. Nevertheless, the dirt of the Italians is as if it were baked into them and ingrained as a part of them.

The Italians are self-willed, thinks Hazlitt, and most indifferent to what others think of them. Their interests are only in themselves; their good spirits are everything to them - food, books, clothing. They enjoy comforts but theirs is in being free; they care nothing for material possessions so long as they can have something to eat. He says that the Italians, generally speaking, do nothing, have nothing and want nothing. And they seem to resort to cheating when it is to their advantage. Laziness keeps the men from being thieves, and the women from being something else. Hazlitt thinks the

maxims inculcated by the climate seem to be "the more, the merrier; the dirtier, the warmer; live and let live."

THE SWISS

The Hazlitts spent fifteen weeks, in the late summer of 1825, in Switzerland after their tour through France and Italy. It would seem to have afforded him the best of opportunities for studying the characteristics of the people; but if he did, he makes only a very few remarks in his notes on the subject. Instead he seems more interested in the country and gives a fine description of the Alps and neighboring scenes.

He says that the inn at Booneville was dirty, poorly provided, with the attendants indifferent and inattentive and the prices high. However, at Geneva the opposite was true; the servants were interested in the guests; living was luxurious; and the prices generally moderate. The fine figures of the women pleased him, but the manners and looks of the general public were not altogether to his liking. "Their looks may be said to be moulded on the republican maxim, that 'you are no better than they,' and on the natural inference from it, that 'they are better than you.'"⁸⁵ And, they have a sort of "scrutinizing and captious air" when they pass you, as if some controversy was depending between you as to the

⁸⁵ Works., IX, p. 295. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

form of religion and government."⁸⁶

As soon as he arrived at a village, located just under the Simplon, he saw girls washing greens in icy waters so that no caterpillars would be left on the vegetables when they were served, and scrubbing their pails and tubs so that no stain would be left. The air, raw and clammy, compliments the scene in its freshness; he says that he has not witnessed a like scene in Italy, where the Italian chills and shudders at the touch of water. There everything is hot, baked, and sticky with filth and laziness; while in Switzerland everything is clear, filtered, and clean. He attributes the unlikeness of the two countries, not to the difference in latitude on one side of the Alps to that on the other, but to the cool, calm Germanic blood of the Swiss ancestors which has poured down through the valleys like iced water; "Whereas that of the Italians, besides its vigorous origin, is enriched and ripened by basking in more genial plains."⁸⁷ But he says, "a single Milanese market-girl (to go no farther south) appeared to me to have more blood in her body, more fire in her eye (as if the sun had made a burning lens of it), more spirit and probably more mischief about her than all the nice, tidy, good-looking, hard-working girls I have seen in Switzerland."

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Works, VII, p. 169. "Hot and Cold."

The Northern people are cleaner than Southern as a general rule; and he thinks that where "life is more cold, weak, and impoverished, there is greater shyness and aversion to come in contact with external matter (with which it does not so easily amalgamate), a greater fastidiousness and delicacy in choosing its sensations."⁸⁸ ...He also believes that the "Southern temperament is (so to speak) more sociable with matter, more gross, impure, indifferent, from relying on its own strength; while that opposed to it, from being less able to react on external applications, is obliged to be more cautious and particular as to the kind of excitement to which it renders itself liable."⁸⁹ Consequently, the manners of the North are timid, reserved and sometimes hypocritical; whereas those of the South are bold, free, light, and licentious.

The Swiss, like the English, depend on their comforts as "helps to enjoyment or hindrances to annoyance"⁹⁰ and as a result they take especial interest in the things that accommodate or luxuriate them. The more any people need material objects for existence or enjoyment, says Hazlitt, the more thought and concern will they take in them, by

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

washing, scouring, and polishing. A Swiss dairy-maid washes the pails until they are snow-white and a kitchen maid washes vegetables until the taste is washed away; both are clean about their persons. Hazlitt says that the coarsest of furniture in Switzerland is cleaned and polished more than the greatest pieces of art in Italy. In Switzerland one finds the whitest of bed sheets and the beds are like "a peeled wand." A people remarkable for cleanliness is usually industrious and honest; the Swiss value their property, work hard to get it, and fear to lose it.

THE HOLLANDERS

On his return to England from his tour of the Continent in October, 1825, Hazlitt traveled down the Rhine River through Holland. The Germanic cleanliness of the Hollanders was comparable to that of the Swiss and Hazlitt was pleased with such conditions. Since the country was flat it was possible for him to see a greater extent of the landscape, and he especially enjoyed the exceptionally prosperous and thrifty appearance of the country with its herds and flocks in rich meadows, the woods, cornfields, great networks of roads running in different directions, canals, boats, windmills, bridges, and countless villages and towns. He remarks that the rich uninterrupted cultivation, the signs of successful industry and smiling plenty, are equally commendable and exhilarating!⁹¹

He finds the Hollanders devotedly clean people with a love for pretty homes and substantial buildings on farms, in cities and towns and along their canals. He seems to have been curiously amused in seeing the housemaids each morning turn a leather hose on the house to wash the walls and windows free from dust; but these same Hollanders, he says, nearly suffocate a traveler on a boat or in a coach with the over abundant supply of tobacco smoke, and nowhere in Holland does

⁹¹ Works, IX, p. 300. "Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy."

he see a set of clean teeth.

Hazlitt writes that the inn at Amsterdam is one of the best he had visited, and that an inn is usually indicative of the civilization and comfort of a nation. He finds that the Dutch are not an idealistic people but instead are practical and devote their fancy and talents to the ordinary, familiar things of life.

It is obvious that Hazlitt was impressed with the comforts and the cleanliness everywhere, with the friendliness of the people, and with the productivity of the tracts of fertile land. And he thinks, too, that seeing cities, towns, comforts, people laughing and gay, good manners, and common sense on the European side of the channel is one of the main purposes of travel. Furthermore, he seems to think that it would be well for the Englishman to "enlarge his notions of existence and enjoyment beyond it (England), and he will not think the worse of his own country, for thinking better of human nature."⁹²

⁹² Ibid., p. 301.

THE SCOTCH

In his essay "On the Scotch Character" (1822) Hazlitt says that the Scotch nation is as united as a corporation and sticks together like bees. He says he doesn't know just how it is with the Scotch themselves, but in their associations and dealings with others they are united as if they were one man. There are no strong individuals, but instead everyone is a determined personification of the land from which he comes. Hazlitt thinks that a Scotchman succeeds in the world more easily because he is not one, but many. Furthermore, it seems to him that a Scotchman has a dual existence because he represents himself and his homeland. In fact, it seems that every Scotchman is "bond and surety"⁹³ for every other countryman and he is so biased that he thinks anything that is not Scotch is foreign to him. Hazlitt sounds a bit sarcastic when he says that one would think that there was no other place in the world but Scotland, because the Scotchman tries to convince everyone else of the superiority of his homeland to all other places. Someone at a literary dinner in Scotland apologised for alluding to the name of Shakespeare so often because he was not a Scotchman, and Hazlitt's comment was "What a blessing the Duke of Wellington was not a Scotch-

⁹³ Works, XII, p. 253. "On Scotch Character."

man, or we should never have heard the last of him!"⁹⁴ Hazlitt says that it is plainly seen that a Scotchman is never easy until he gets his favorite subject started, seeming assured that every one he speaks to must be as fond of talking about Scotland as he is.

It seems likely also that the pitting of the Scotch against all other nations is a relic of clanship. A Scotchman is valueless to himself unless he is opposed to others or leagued with them; he must favor someone or else oppose him; and he must have something to battle for, or an idea to carry in an argument, says Hazlitt.

Hazlitt finds, also, that a Scotchman is not proud of himself as a man, but of his being a Scotchman. He doesn't accuse a Scotchman of being conceited by any means but there is often something that makes one think so. One of Hazlitt's comparisons aptly applies to this point: "An Irishman is mostly vain of his person, and Englishman of his understanding, a Frenchman of his politeness--a Scotchman thanks God for the place of his birth."⁹⁵

The Scotch, he says, are great followers of habit; they pin their faith on example and authority, and their ideas have previously been fixed and attached to those of others. Sir Walter Scott, their greatest living writer, is "the genius

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 255.

of national tradition;"⁹⁶ he lacks imagination to discover anything new and different and relies on the past and to things which have grown out of tradition. Also their greatest writer, Hazlitt says, "if given costume, dialect, manners, popular superstitions, grotesque characters, supernatural events, and local scenery, is a prodigy, a man-monster among writers--take these materials away from him and he is a common man with as little original power of mind as he has independence or boldness of spirit."⁹⁷ However, he cites Scott's success in writing novels of the scenery and manners of England and France, and Hazlitt says that no one admires or delights in the Scotch novel more than he himself does. But, he says, at the same time when another asserts that Scott's "mind is of the same class as Shakespeare, or that he imitates nature in the same way, I confess I cannot assent to it."⁹⁸

The Scotch are a disagreeable nation, who object to every appearance of comfort themselves and refuse it to others; their climate, their religion, and their habits are equally adverse to pleasure.⁹⁹ Hazlitt thinks also that the manners

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 256.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Works., VII, p. 340. "Sir Walter Scott, Racine and Shakespeare."

⁹⁹ Works, XII, pp. 181-182. "On Disagreeable People."

of the Scotch are distinguished by a fawning flattery which assists them gain benefits for themselves or hides their natural defects, and which makes other people sick, or by a sullen callousness makes them tremble.

Hazlitt feels that the Scotch are cowardly in friendship; they stoop to power and would more quickly fall upon and crush an individual than come to his assistance. "They will support a generic denomination where they have numbers to support them: ...they make a great gulp, and swallow down a feudal lord with all the retinue he can muster--'the more, the merrier'--but of a single unprotected straggler they are shy, jealous, scrupulous, in the extreme as to character, inquisitive as to connections, curious in all particulars of birth, parentage and education."¹⁰⁰ If it is to a Scotchman's benefit to stand by you, he will; but if it is of no worth to him, he will not stomach it or allow his conscience to be bothered and you'll have to shift for yourself. Hazlitt says that the Englishman and Irishman are more generous and magnanimous. But a Scotchman always, (of course there are exceptions, no doubt) looks first to the consequences to himself. A Scotchman, it seems, is always faithful to a leader although Hazlitt says that the fidelity amounts to little more than servility.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 256. "On Scotch Character."

Hazlitt finds that the Scotchman has very little mental courage. Nothing must be said against the friend of a Scotchman; but if anything is said about another person's character, the Scotchman will shun that person like a "plague-pot." The Scotchman seldom tries to disprove anything said of another for fear he might be considered of like character. He seems ready to accept the bad opinions of others from mere hearsay, and if he knows anything good about the person in question, he keeps it from him and from the world. Hazlitt cites the example of a Scotch lawyer who defends an accused person only so far as it is consistent with his own character.

In Number XLVI of "Common Places" (1823)¹⁰¹ he says that "Scotch understanding differs from the English, as an Encyclopedia does from a circulating library. An Englishman is contented to pick up a few odd and ends of knowledge; a Scotchman is master of every subject alike. Here each individual has a particular 'hobby' and favorite bye-path of his own: in Scotland learning is a common hack, which every one figures away with, and uses at his pleasure."

Again in Number LXXXV, he quotes from Scott about the funeral customs of Scotland. At one time, it seems, a law was passed by the Parliament of Scotland restraining funeral procedures. Scott says that he has known many persons who

¹⁰¹ Works, XI, p. 545. "Common Places."

deprived themselves of the comforts and necessities of life so that they could save enough money which their surviving relatives would spend for fitting services; and that their executors could not be advised to turn the money to the benefit of the living. The Scotch who live in barren, remote districts are more used to the face of nature than of human beings. To them the world is a living tomb and it is no different to tread it than to lie beneath it. Since life is cold, comfortless, bare of enjoyments, and filled with privation and self-denial, the thought of the grave brings joy and happy anticipation.

Why there are such quantities of looking-glasses in Italy and none in Scotland is a question to Hazlitt. He says that the dirt in each country is equal but the finery is not; also in Scotland the people do not use the "aid of the Fine Arts, the upholsterer and tapisserie, to multiply the images of the former in squalid decorations, and thus show that the debasement is moral as well as physical."¹⁰²

It seems from Hazlitt's description of the Scotch that he does find virtue in their determined self-will, the driving at a purpose; so that whatever they undertake, they make thorough-stitch work, and carry as far as it will go.

¹⁰² Works, IX, p. 201 (footnote)

In his essay No. LXXXVI, he uses the following quotations from Scott's Heart of Midlothian, Vol. IV, p. 13.

"There are, I believe, more associations common to the inhabitants of a wild and rude than of a well-cultivated and fertile country: their ancestors have more seldom changed their place of residence; ...the high and low are interested in each other's welfare; the feelings of kindred and relationship are more widely extended."¹⁰³

Then Hazlitt expressed his own opinion as follows:

"In fact, then, the mind more easily forms a strong abstracted attachment to the soil in remote and barren regions, where few artificial objects or pursuits fritter away attention, or divert it from its devotion to the naked charms of nature. And again in a rude and scattered population, where there is a dearth or craving after general society, we become more closely and permanently attached to those few persons with whom neighborhood, or kindred, or a common cause, or similar habits or language bring us into contact."

He explains this with the example of two Englishmen who might meet in the wilds of Arabia. They would instantly become friends, though they had never seen one another before, from want of all other society and sympathy. So it is in ruder and earlier stages of civilization. And he concludes this is what attaches the Highlander to his hill and to his clan. This is what attaches Scotch men to their country and to one another.

¹⁰³ Works, XI, p. 559. "Common Places," No. LXXXVI.

THE IRISH

Even though his father was Irish, Hazlitt makes few comments about the Irish, either as individuals or as a nation. And in his essay "On Personal Identity" (1829) he writes, "I can understand the Irish character better than the Scotch."¹⁰⁴ However, he fails to give any reasons or explanation why he feels as he does.

An article by V. S. Pritchett in The New Statesman¹⁰⁵ gives his comments about Hazlitt's Irish characteristics. A French acquaintance of Mr. Pritchett's said that Hazlitt was "very mild, very English," but Mr. Pritchett says that if Hazlitt is mild, he is not English; he is naturally three-parts Irish. He says further that if the Irish have a fault, it is one we often wince at in Hazlitt's writing. He has an air of feeling something, but he does not feel that thing. Irish rebels, causists, and intriguants often show a kind of intellectual distraction underneath. The Irish mind is inconclusive and there is a manifestation of sociability. He says also that the Irish have raised sociability to the rank of the fine arts and Hazlitt especially had that gift; intellectually, Mr. Pritchett says he means, for Hazlitt was uncertain in company. His writing is social and is by a man

¹⁰⁴ Works, XII, p. 207. "On Personal Identity."

¹⁰⁵ The New Statesman, p. 78, Vol. 25.

who thinks that ideas must shake down together, that ideas are men talking, that ideas must submit to the judgment of an experienced if unwise world.¹⁰⁶

In his essay "On the Scotch Character" (1822) Hazlitt remarks that the Irish and other visitors are not so eager to talk about their homelands when they visit in England; even though they are just as prejudiced about it as the Scotch are, instead they keep their self praise to themselves and don't monopolize the conversations of any gatherings they attend. In fact he says that "the native of the sister-kingdom in particular rather out their country like a poor relation, are shy of being seen in each other's company, and try to soften down the 'brogue' into a natural gentility of expression."¹⁰⁷ Not so the Scotchman who is uneasy until the conversation turns to his country; he seems to think that everyone is as fond of Scotland as he is.

Hazlitt's most elaborate comment on the Irish is given in his essay "On Good-Nature." (1816).¹⁰⁸

The first quality mentioned of the Irish is their good nature with many virtues from the heart and not the head. Theirs are sincere passions and affections, but their under-

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Works, XII, p. 254. "On the Scotch Character."

¹⁰⁸ Works, I, pp. 104-105. "On Good-Nature."

standing is hypocritical. Anytime they begin to calculate consequences, they permit their self-interest to interfere. Hazlitt says that "an Irishman who trusts to his principles and a Scotchman who yields to his impulses are equally dangerous."¹⁰⁹ The Irish are witty, eloquent, imaginative, and affectionate. However, they lack understanding and as a result they have no standard of thought or of action. Their warmth of feeling and quickness of thought are too fast for their strength of mind. They are crude, rash, and discordant both in thought and in action; they act by starts and fits and do not remain long at any one thing. Being of a wild nature, they do not like restrictions on their understandings or hindrances on their wills. To assert their natural freedom of will, they fly into the face of their benefactors and friends; while they consider it a reclamation of their rights "to betray the principles they are most bound by their own professions and the expectations of others to maintain."¹¹⁰ They are inconsistent and lack good faith; they combine fierceness and levity. Selfishness and cunning usually get the best of them in the long run, and they lose interest and feeling when novelty or opposition terminates, and instead they become cold and sluggish. "Their blood, if not heated

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

by passion, turns to poison. They have rancour in their hatred of any object they have abandoned, proportioned to the attachment they have professed to it. Their zeal converted against itself, is furious."¹¹¹

Hazlitt concludes his remarks on the Irish with a comment about Burke who, he says, was "an instance of an Irish patriot and philosopher. He abused metaphysics, because he could make nothing out of them, and turned his back upon liberty, when he found he could get nothing more by her."¹¹² In 1823 he wrote that Burke "was an orator (almost a poet) who reasoned in figures because he had an eye for nature."¹¹³ Before that in 1821 he said of him, "if there are any greater prose writers, they either lie out of my course of study, or beyond my sphere of comprehension."¹¹⁴ It is known, of course, that Hazlitt had a deep regard for Burke and honored him with the essay "On the Character of Mr. Burke," but it is also true that Hazlitt's regard was changed to rebuke because of the attitude Burke took at the time of the French Revolution.

Hazlitt seemed to enjoy Mr. Plunkett, an Irish orator, who debated in the English parliament (1820) on the Catholic

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 105.

¹¹³ Works, XII, p. 264 (1823). "My First Acquaintance with the Poets."

¹¹⁴ Works, VII, p. 473 (1821). "On Reading Old Books."

question. He said that Plunkett was the best Irish speaker that he had ever heard; in fact, he was the best speaker without any exception whatever; he liked his style of workmanship and his eloquence which swept along like a river. He knew all the phases of his subject and passed quickly and easily from one to another without any hesitation, without affectation and without effort. Hazlitt said he had never heard another speech that he himself would "have given three farthings to have made."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Works, XI, p. 473, (1820). "Parliamentary Eloquence."

THE GERMANS

Hazlitt makes no mention of the characteristics and customs of the German people or of their country; but he seems deeply interested in the translations of the works of Schiller, Goethe, Holbein, Kant and other German authors. When he was a student at Hackney College (1793) a translation of The Robbers was passed around and he had the privilege of reading it.¹¹⁶ He wrote as follows about the play: "The Robbers was the first play I ever read; and the effect it produced upon me was the greatest. It stunned me like a blow, and I have not recovered enough from it to describe how it was."¹¹⁷ He says that if he were to live longer, the books which he read in his youth would never be forgotten. "Five-and-twenty years have elapsed since I first read the translation of The Robbers, but they have not blotted the impression from my mind."¹¹⁸ No one ever asks whether or not The Robbers is German, but rather "relishes Schiller because he is barbarous, violent and like Shakespeare."¹¹⁹

"How eagerly I slaked my thirst of German sentiment, 'as a hart panteth for the water-springs'; how I bathed and

¹¹⁶ MacLean, Op. Cit., p. 75.

¹¹⁷ Works, V, p. 362. "On the German Drama."

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Works, VII, p. 328. "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars."

reveled and added my flood of tears to Goethe's Sorrows of Werter and Schiller's The Robbers."¹²⁰ These writers, says Hazlitt, considered Werter and The Robbers worst of all their works because they were most popular."¹²¹

In February 1816, Hazlitt reviewed the English translation of Schlegel's lecture on the drama, which had been delivered at Vienna in 1808. Hazlitt begins his review by stating that since the work is of German nature it is to be received with allowances, which that school usually requires; nevertheless, it is a good piece of work. He is sorry, he says, to begin his criticism with an unmeaning sneer, and he will proceed to show what he thinks is the weakness of German literature.

It seems evident to Hazlitt that in everything the Germans attempt, they are more influenced by the desire of distinction than by any impulse of imagination or the awareness of extraordinary qualifications. They are not always necessarily filled with their subject, but more often choose it because they feel it is one that should be treated with due care and one from which something good may come. Hence they study and think deeply; and when they have arrived at some unusual or paradoxical view, they set to work with all

¹²⁰ Works, I, p. 76. "On Imitation."

¹²¹ Ibid.

their might. Hazlitt thinks the result of such procedure is "a grand systematic conclusion." He thinks that the German writers have done well in various fields, but their pretentious claims far exceed their accomplishments.

Hazlitt calls them "universal undertakers and complete encyclopedists, in all moral and critical science."¹²² They are prepared for any and all questions with a large supply of logical and metaphysical principles, and the less they know about a subject the more use they make of their abundant supply. Once in poetry they went to extreme lengths in violent affect and then, continues Hazlitt, they turned completely round with equal extravagance to the production of no effect whatever.

He thinks that the Germans are a slow, ponderous people who can be put into action only by some severe and oft repeated impulse in which they lose control of themselves and forge ahead regardless of anything. To them truth "is never what is, but what according to the system, ought to be."¹²³ Using a figure of speech, Hazlitt likens the Germans to miners who have confused the waste and the ore and counted their gains by amount rather than quality. They are a little inclined, Hazlitt suspects, to take the will for the deed,

¹²² Works, X, p. 78. "Schlegel on the Drama."

¹²³ Ibid.

and are sometimes incapable of distinguishing effort from success. He says that they feel most at home in matters of fact and learned inquiries."¹²⁴

It appears that Hazlitt considered the German authors forced and mechanical in art, but generally having everything that relies on strength of understanding and persevering exertion, but needing ease, quickness and flexibility.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

THE AMERICANS

Hazlitt spent his years from six to nine in America, but he has made very little mention of the character of the people. It would seem that life in the new land was not being enjoyed by young William, as this letter to his father shows.

"My dear Papa, I shall never forget that we came to America. If we had not come we should not have been away from one and other, though now it can not be helped. I think for my part that it would have been a great deal better if the white people had not found it out. Let the others (probably Indians) have it to themselves, for it was made for them..."¹²⁵

In his essay "Why Distant Objects Please" (1821) he says that he has "more lively recollections of certain scents, tastes, and sounds, than he has of mere visible images, because they are more original and less worn by frequent repetition."¹²⁶

And then he recalls the taste of barberries which had been out in the snow during a severe North American winter and the taste of them remains in his mouth after a lapse of thirty years. He says that no other taste has ever been like it and it remains all by itself.

MacLean suggests that Hazlitt must have had some recollections because he praises Cobbett's descriptions of the "gold and scarlet plumage of American birds."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ MacLean, Op. Cit., pp. 21-22.

¹²⁶ Works, VI, pp. 258-259. "Why Distant Objects Please."

¹²⁷ Ibid.

In 1829 Hazlitt reviewed "American Literature - Dr. Channing"¹²⁸ in which he comments on some of the American writers who had had some reputation in England. The foremost of these were Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper and Charles Brockden Brown. He says that the air in Irving's native land was too thin and poor to fulfill his ambitions, so he gasped for British popularity and came and found it. And, says Hazlitt, Irving imitated and admired the British and wanted their praise and acceptance, but "he brought no new earth, no sprig of laurel gathered in the wilderness, no red bird's wing, no gleam from crystal lake or new-discovered fountain."¹²⁹ Instead he brought his works which were too similar to British authors and in which they saw themselves reflected.

It appears that Hazlitt thinks Brown's novels are filled with an imagination which is "forced, violent, and shocking;" this is to be expected, states Hazlitt, because in a new country like America there can be no natural imagination without a background of superstition, tradition, and folklore such as is found in the bleak, northern realms of England. He continues by saying that the map of America lacks

¹²⁸ Works, X, pp. 310-330. "American Literature - Dr. Channing."

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 311.

historical foundation and until fiction is built on the period and land of its author it is not good for much. "The genius of America is essentially mechanical and modern."¹³⁰

People in America are so "well policed", Hazlitt thinks, so free from the understanding of fraud or force, and so free from the attacks of "the flesh and the devil" that they hoot the Beggar's Opera from the stage because for them there is no knowledge of poverty, crime, pickpockets, and gallows; all such things are beyond their sense of credibility.

Three more American writers were written about: Benjamin Franklin, Hector St. John and Jonathon Edwards who had attained a place in the "scanty annals of American Literature" before the others previously mentioned. Of the last named he says that "Franklin, the most celebrated, was emphatically an American, a great experimental philosopher, a consummate politician and a paragon of common sense."¹³¹ His Poor Robin is an outstanding helpful book for a country attempting to forge ahead by itself, thinks Hazlitt. Even through some persons accuse Franklin of lacking imagination or of being too practical, Hazlitt disagrees and says that there is more genius in Franklin's truth and usefulness of his ideas than there is in those who criticize him.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 314.

¹³¹ Ibid.

The American Farmer's Letters by Hector St. John appears to impress Hazlitt with its interesting descriptions of the scenery and the manners in the new land, and Hazlitt says that not the objects themselves are given but the feelings and characteristics. St. John tells of his invention of attaching a chair to a plow and having his child ride back and forth across the field with him while his wife sits knitting beneath a nearby tree, of the battle between two snakes, and of the sound of the humming-bird's wings. St. John also pictures in a true and heartfelt manner, says Hazlitt, the artless people of Nantucket, thankfully rejoicing after successful but dangerous and perilous fishing trips. It appears that Hazlitt has gathered from St. John's descriptions the idea that Americans are eager and brisk about their feelings and amusements.

Hazlitt pays tribute to Jonathon Edwards as a most able logician and a metaphysician in whom the Americans need not feel shame. He says also that Edwards is an acute, powerful reasoner, who is sincere and conscientious.

Referring to the "Beggar's Opera"¹³² again and to its being reduced to two acts, Hazlitt remarks that some of the allusions are too deep for Americans and some others too difficult to understand. American people do not have the manners portrayed in the play and they have no conception of

¹³² Works, XII, p. 169. "On Reading New Books."

anything which they do not see. He says that because everything in America is so young in growth, it is necessary for the Americans to apply to the mother country for opinions; and even though Americans may be free and independent in politics, they are not free from England in literature. Hazlitt says that the English authors have a sympathetic power with nature void of thoughts of themselves and come very near to genius in doing so. But the American authors who are so unskilled in writing do not have this unaffected style and as a result are cut off from the English by constant comparisons to them or else by their own conceited opinions of their own works. Their fear of being thought common and unrefined, Hazlitt thinks, makes them just that and their desire to be something in the literary world prevents them from being it.

In his essay "On Depth and Superficiality"¹³³ Hazlitt cites the anecdote of two sisters to show the contrast of primitive America and older countries with greater pasts. An American lady married well and had several children; soon after her sister married a richer husband and had a larger and possibly finer family, but the former pined and was unhappy and finally died. Hazlitt says that someone had said that such a thing could happen only in America; and that it

¹³³ Works, VII, pp. 346-360. "On Depth and Superficiality."

was a characteristic of republican individuals and institutions, where jealousy had nothing high or far away to attract its attention, to fix itself upon the happiness of persons closest to it and be constantly present until it gnawed itself to death upon them. Hazlitt says that the peculiar circumstances which caused her death were the "country and state of society." In America there are no "towering and artificial heights" such as are found in "old and monarchical states" to carry away the rancours and spleen of envy and to turn small advantages into insignificance; and he seems to think that the "advantages of birth station" in countries which have social fabric made of lefty and unequal materials usually carry the mind from its own domestic realm and take away imaginary jealousy and spleen.¹³⁴

Another American whom Hazlitt mentions is Thomas Paine, whom he calls a great writer. He thinks he is a more sententious writer than Cobbett and one whose quotations are commonly remembered. He seems to like Paine's short sentences which are to the point and give a complete picture of a question past, present, and to come; and he thinks that Paine is one who makes up his mind and forms his opinions before writing and then expresses them as pointedly as he can.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 359.

¹³⁵ Works, VI, pp. 51-52. "Character of Cobbett."

CONCLUSION

During his travels on the Continent, Hazlitt was usually satisfied and pleased with the service and accommodations at the hotels and inns where he stayed or with the coaches and other means of travel; nevertheless he found many discomforts and quite often the apartments and sleeping quarters were little better than barns and stables. But in spite of being inconvenienced, of being taken advantage of, and often of being cheated, he seems to have enjoyed his experiences in the spirit of the good traveler that he was.

Generally speaking he found the Italians to be the dirtiest and most unpleasant foreigners; whereas those of Switzerland and Holland were the cleanest and most industrious. Hazlitt found that the French innkeepers and servants surpassed the Italians in civility, politeness, and service, especially if the traveler spoke the French language. Italian landlords and servants were indolent, indifferent and often dishonest with their guests, but those of Holland and Switzerland were congenial and obliging. Northern people were cleaner than Southern; the manners of the North were timid and reserved, those of the South, bold, free and licentious. Hazlitt seemed to believe that Northern climates had a tendency to make people actively industrious, but the the Southern inculcated the maxims, "the more, the merrier;

the dirtier, the warmer; live and let live." Parisians were discourteous on the streets and gave no consideration to other pedestrians, especially foreigners; and if a traveler complained he was the one at fault. Wherever Hazlitt traveled he seemed to enjoy his experiences among picturesque people and places. He especially enjoyed the beauty of the Swiss mountains with their steep, dangerous roads, the carnival crowds in Italy, and the great throngs of people in Rome during Lent and Easter with the variety of costumes, their handsome features and good-humoured faces. He was delighted with the prosperous, thrifty appearance of Holland and of Northern Italy and the cleanliness of Switzerland.

England and Englishmen had peculiarities and customs that were as strange and amusing as any of those found in other nationalities. And critical as Hazlitt was of foreign people, he was not averse to finding fault with his own country and people, who commonly classified as good, everything that was English; and bad, everything that was foreign.

He was impressed with the intellectual life, particularly in France, where he thought both men and women were probably more avid readers than the English and probably more thoughtful. The English were a modest people except when they found a neighbor who was more self-sufficient than they and then their pride was provoked. The Germans he classed as a slow, ponderous people, who forged ahead regardless of

anything, who studied and thought deeply, but in the end laid claim to greater credit for accomplishment than Hazlitt thought they deserved.

If Hazlitt had a "Smollett-like repugnance for foreigners," it has not been shown in any of the sources of this study. It is apparent that he found other nationalities to be much like the English who certainly were not without fault. But, for example, when he criticized foreigners, especially the French, he invariably criticized the English in the next breath and sometimes that criticism was the more caustic of the two. He believed that the English were a nation of egotists who expected others to swallow the bait of their self-love.

Honest in all of his writings and opinions he wrote only that which he himself observed concerning individuals and nations. Although he criticized foreigners severely it is perhaps possible that he was attempting by this criticism to show his countrymen their own faults and peculiarities. From this study it is evident that Hazlitt was not more prejudiced against foreigners than against his own countrymen.

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